

Arms & Armor -

Larry  
Haeckels  
P. D.  
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Armor has been a part of life for so many years that its beginnings, like man's own are lost. Primitive at first, then taking on splendor with the growth of art and with the hero worship accorded great leaders like Achilles, whose armor the gods made, it has come down to us with a double glamour. It is history and it is art, the form of art most closely allied with humanity and its will to live, a part of the very struggle for existence in the great fighting centuries.

Armor, as we know it from its surviving forms, is an incomplete record, one that must be pieced out by consulting old effigies on the tombs of knights, early illuminations, seals, and references in the literature of many centuries. All this lack of actual armor only adds to the value of what is left, as the sibyl's books, reduced from nine to three, became triply precious.

During the three hundred years between 1400 and 1700, the armorer was recognized as an artist, one who wrought into beauty a very difficult material, and whose work had, aside from its aesthetic importance, the very vital function of defending a man against the danger of death. Even after its use had declined, armor continued to be recognized as art of high rank, but with the social upheavals of the late eighteenth century, there came a period when appreciation of fine old suits of steel was at its lowest ebb. Armor had been so definitely a badge of high station that its destruction became a symbol of the leveling of all ranks and was, in such deluges as the French Revolution, the more joyously carried on. And in countries where the third estate came less explosively into power, an even more deadly indifference and neglect had their effect. Armor was like too recently cast-off clothing, out of style without having as yet attained to respect as being ancient. It lacked perspective, a quality which it has only gained within the last fifty years. A few collectors "above the clouds" in art matters kept the beauty of armor clear in their minds and have brought together what destruction and neglect have spared. European museums have preserved as much for its historical significance as for its art value, most of the fine armor which has survived. Armor of significance

in great families has been gathered in, and here and there a private collector has searched the field and then disposed of his findings in a group.

In America there is not a great amount of armor. The Metropolitan Museum has a splendid collection, and there are, in and about New York, several small private collections of splendid quality. The Cleveland Museum has been fortunate in securing, by the gift of Mr. and Mrs. John L. Severance, the armor gathered in Europe by Frank Gair Macomber, a collection which contains some very beautiful pieces. These were added to by later gifts of Mr. and Mrs. Severance, until the Armor Court of the Museum presents a most attractive display. In all there are five hundred ninety-eight pieces, comprising fifteen suits and partial suits, thirty-nine separate helmets, many valuable pieces of body armor, and excellent examples of riveted chain mail, one hundred twenty-one swords of splendid quality, guns and gun parts, crossbows and their winders, maces, daggers, and eighty-nine pole arms.